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Central Intelligence Agency
Office of the Deputy Director for Intelligence

20 May 1985

NOTE TO: C/IPC

Attached is a memo from Richard Childress addressing the POW/MIA issue for SIG(I) meeting on 23 May. Please take the necessary action, filtering it into talking points for Mr. McMahon. Please be sure Mr. Kerr gets a drop copy, too.

Sue
O/ADDI

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY DIRECTOR

17 May 1985

NOTE FOR: ADDI

FROM: EA/DDCI

Dick,

Would you please take appropriate action on the attached, filtering it into the package for next week's SIG(I) meeting? I assume you'll be preparing some talking points for John which could include whatever is appropriate from the attached.

Thanx

[redacted]

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Attachment

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NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20506

Executive Registry
85- 2035

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May 17, 1985

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE HONORABLE JOHN N. McMAHON
Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT: Narrative on POW/MIA Issue by SIG(I) Committee

I just read the review of anticipated world events and issues for FY 1986 published by the Agency that you forwarded along with a request for inputs for National Intelligence Topics.

The POW/MIA narrative is of concern and I wanted to informally provide you with my views that could be passed to relevant analysts. Having designed our strategy and been the Administration's interlocutor for policy-level discussions with their Foreign Minister (four times) over the past four years, some of the statements clearly do not comport with my experience, diplomatic or intelligence traffic. The information herein is minimal and accompanied by an invitation to those who wrote it to come over and receive a thorough briefing on the 10-part US Government strategy, the history of the issue and the domestic dynamics. It is critical that Agency analysts understand where the issue stands.

Some sample statements and brief analysis:

Statement: The leaders of the governments of Laos and Vietnam, however, insist publicly and privately that they have released all US military and civilian personnel captive during the war and have returned all available remains.

Publicly, they have said this, but privately their attitude takes a different cast. The Vietnamese, while saying they know of no Americans in Vietnam have also acknowledged the possibility of "pilots escaping after their crash into remote areas" and "investigating live sighting reports on their own" (a tacit admission of the possibility). Whether we believe such statements or they mean such statements is not the critical question, it is why are they making them. Are they saying yes, we have some or we want you to believe in the possibility? Our efforts on the diplomatic side have been directed at some sort of admission (while dangling the thought of clear benefits for them) so we can play "let's make a deal." We have also

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provided a variety of scenarios or suggestions on how they could play a release publicly knowing full well the import for them of a live prisoner return at this late date. Although they have not admitted holding remains in a warehouse, they have privately made it clear to me through gestures and statements, such as, "Yes, you are right, we can do much more." They know that we know and that this needs to be settled.

Statement: All their "humanitarian" efforts -- the return of remains and the quarterly meetings with US representatives for technical discussions on the POW/MIA issue -- are subtly linked to questions of their perceived national interest including repatriation funds owed them by the US and the US/China relationship.

They do make subtle linkages, but not this way. The statement says "repatriation funds" which I assume means "reparation funds." The Vietnamese have never raised reparations in connection with the issue in this Administration. Foreign Minister Thach has specifically ruled it out totally with me because of a recognition that this question soured US/SRV normalization talks with the Carter Administration. We have gone to great efforts to counter public misinformation that furnishing $3.5 billion in reparations will solve the POW issue and to see it in an official document after four years of countering it publicly is disturbing. Vietnamese linkage is to US/SRV normalization which they would hope eventually leads to aid and trade, (primarily the latter) in a normal international mode. They are too pragmatic to expect reparations. The only funds we discuss in our technical meetings are those related to direct costs which we would bear in such activities as joint crash site searches. (FYI, we are up to a minimum of six meetings per year agreed upon by Thach when I was in Hanoi in March.)

Statement: Cooperation is an "on and off" thing depending possibly on political advantages to be gained at the time and to encourage controversy between next of kin and the US Government.

This statement indicates a lack of familiarity with Hanoi's real strategy and perception of our domestic scene and ignores the lack of any resolution of cases for over two years (1979-1981) and consistent increasing pattern of cooperation since 1981 responding to our developed strategy. The only interruption in this pattern was the delay in technical meetings after the purposeful intervention by Secretary Shultz at the ASEAN post-ministerial conference in 1983 to signal progress was entirely too slow. Within two months, I was meeting with Thach privately in New York advising him on how to move forward. The writer may not know the next of kin, but the Vietnamese do. They take the hardest line position on aid, trade and recognition of anyone concerned on this issue. Because the families are central to the issue, our strategy called for close cooperation with the



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National League of Families. Their Executive Director, Ann Griffiths, has classified access, is a member of the interagency group and acted as an intermediary to set up my trip to Hanoi, the Armitage delegation and my original four-hour private dinner with Foreign Minister Thach in New York. The "Chinese opera" we play with the Vietnamese through this cooperation is working.

We know the Vietnamese look for opportunities to exploit this issue domestically, but they know that their attempts with the families have met strong silence or hostility. They have instead attempted to exploit contacts with those sympathetic to their aims, such as the national leadership of the Vietnam Veterans of America and certain humanitarian groups. During my last trip to Hanoi, Thach even acknowledged that the families were "reactionary" but not too reactionary to work with after Ann Griffiths' seven meetings with him. In the first meeting I held with Thach, I told him of my "personal admiration" of the way the Vietnamese could manipulate public opinion during the war, but it was anti-war, not pro-Vietnamese and anti-America. They have been deluged with petitions because of our public awareness efforts, both in New York and in Hanoi, saying no aid, trade or recognition until resolution. The message is clear to them and they are reacting to it -- they even acknowledged it in the Indochina Foreign Ministers Communique of 1984.

Statement: The Lao Government has expressed its willingness to cooperate after favorable actions taken by the US Government, such as providing emergency medical supplies, and actions by several Congressmen demonstrated US interest in improving relations.

We agreed with the Lao Government to improve overall relations with our principal measure of sincerity being their progress on the POW/MIA issue. Their major interest at this time is removal of the aid ban in Congress and eventual aid. In cooperation with the League of Families and the Congress, we have held the former hostage to a "sustained pattern of progress." In February, we conducted the first joint excavation of a crash site in Indochina at Pakse and we are now discussing further steps with emphasis on Lao unilateral actions and future excavations. In addition to medical aid, we have voted positively in international financial institutions for loans to Laos and responded to a rice appeal during the drought last year. (This effort has a regional policy dimension as well -- to keep Laos oriented in some degree towards Thailand and the West.) The only Congressmen that have dealt with the Lao in a substantial way were Messrs. Hendon and LeBoutillier and that ended in 1982. I agree we cannot determine how much Lao cooperation has been dictated by Vietnam, but based upon the Foreign Ministers Communique, the timing of the agreement on Pakse and my conversations with the Lao and Vietnamese, I believe Vietnam has blessed the effort, left some of the modalities to Vientiane and hope that the Lao pattern will provide a precedent for Vietnam.



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In summary, we all know that the Vietnamese only act in their pragmatic self-interest and our definition of humanitarian and their acknowledgment is a useful fiction, and our strategy maximizes this fact. It is, therefore, very important for anyone dealing with this issue to understand the effort in a comprehensive way, so we can be assured we are remaining ahead of the "boys in Hanoi." Thus far, we are, but informed analysts can aid us in staying that way. I stand ready to help them. Should they come over, I visualize a good 30 minutes of sensitive reading and then discussion.

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Richard T. Childress



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